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A BORROWED GRANDFATHER By Don Mark Lemon



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"Please, ma'am, may we borrow your broom and dust-pans?"

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Allen, critically regarding the sharp-faced little girl who had just knocked at the kitchen door. "Borrow my broom and dust-pans?"

"Yes, ma'am, if you please. We are your new neighbors, and our things haven't come yet."

"Come in, child," said Mrs. Allen, good-naturedly drawing the little girl into the kitchen. "Of course, if your things haven't come, you may borrow my broom and dust-pans, but you must return them as soon as you are done using them."

"Yes, ma'am," said the child, while her sharp, blue-green eyes gleamed with impish glee.

"Two fathers? What do you mean, child?"

"One of them is your grandfather," explained the little girl.

Mrs. Allen laughed sharply. "Did you borrow your grandfather?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, but you may, if you want to."

"May what, child?"

"Borrow grandfather."

"I'd like to catch myself borrowing your grandfather!" cried Mrs. Allen, highly indignant at the idea.

"Or anybody else's grandfather! You may run home now, and don't forget that I want that tea-kettle returned by half-past four this afternoon!"

The child nodded her head affirmatively, while her sharp, blue-green eyes seemed to take in every object in the room, with a view to later borrowings.

"My feather duster?"

"Yes, ma'am. But if you haven't one, ma'am says I'm to try the peep hole in the big green house over the way."

"Yes, ma'am, we won't," the child replied, and Mrs. Allen sighed at the thought that she was to have a borrowing neighbor.

Sixty minutes had passed when the little girl returned, without bringing back the broom, dust-pans or duster, and asked to borrow a tea-kettle.

"But, child, you haven't returned the other things you borrowed!" expostulated Mrs. Allen.

"No, ma'am, not yet. The house is dreadfully dirty, and ma'am says it will take most all day tomorrow to clean it up."

Mrs. Allen gasped. Her new broom and duster, too! What condition would they be in when they were returned?

"Please, ma'am," repeated the little red-haired girl, not the least abashed by the agitation of Mrs. Allen, "may we borrow your tea-kettle?"

Mrs. Allen felt a sudden desire to slap the child's freckled face, but she thought of the beaten and reflected that it was her Christian duty to look upon these borrowing neighbors as heathen, and do as much for them as for the Senegambians. She brought her copper teakettle and gave it to the little girl.

"You may take it if you will tell your mother that the lady must have it returned by half-past four o'clock this afternoon."

"Yes, ma'am." The child started toward the door with the kettle when she recalled something. "Oh, if you please, ma'am, may we borrow some

"Bring tea, if you have it, but green tea will do."

"Want to borrow some tea, too?" said Mrs. Allen deliberately. "Would you like some sugar with it?"

"Yes, ma'am. But pa says not to borrow it all at one house, 'cause some folks might get dangerous."

"You have a father, then?" exclaimed Mrs. Allen, as if the discovery settled a doubt in her mind.

"Yes, ma'am—two."

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"face had been washed till the freckles were fairly burned, while her red hair was smoothed back painfully, next moistened with a gaunt yellow lotion.

"Oh, please, ma'am," she exclaimed earnestly, still watching her visitor from her hidden approach, "may we borrow your grandfather?"

Mrs. Allen could not believe the earnestness of her own eyes. "borrow your grandfather?"

"Yes, ma'am, if you please. The children, if you'll excuse me, are my granddaughters, not enough for three enough for three granddaughters."

"Well," Mrs. Allen let her thoughts drift off from her broom and dustpan to the child.

"If you please, ma'am, I know we mustn't return the broom and dustpan and dinner and tea-kettle, but I suppose cross my heart to bring back my grandfather before full evening."

The sharp, blue-green eyes pierced the space back of Mrs. Allen. "Here he comes again! Oh, I think we might borrow him, though. I said you could borrow him, once."

"What does the child want? Mrs. Allen came across the room, but did not stop to speak to her.

"She wants to borrow him," said Mrs. Allen steadily.

"Yes, sir, if you please," nodded the child.

"Grandfather! Allen pounced like a squirrel on the child, took the sharp, blue-green eyes in her hands, and held them close to her own.

"It is not for myself I come, but for my poor, injured Allen, with no home or friends of their own if I do."

"Hush!" mouthed Mrs. Allen. "Don't speak so loud, or grandmother will hear us talking about her."

The child was silent, except to say, "Goodness sakes, child, do you think we might borrow him?"

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"Why not?" demanded the old woman.

"Oh, goodness!" cried the little red-haired girl.

"Perhaps twenty minutes had passed when her indignation got the better of her astonishment and Christian meekness. "Lend me your grandfather!" she exclaimed. "What will Robert say to me?" Bessie Allen, dead to the body, and yet able to move, though her limbs were gone.

"Please, ma'am," said the child, "you needn't wait for telling what beautiful stories about living the life of the world we found you, and the life we're going to find, unless we never go past."

"There's something wrong," she told herself. "Oh, if anything has happened to Grandfather I will never forgive you, Bessie Allen. 'Cross my heart.'

Voice came from an inner room, and distinguishing that it was Grandmother, she stepped into the hallway.

"Grandmother! Allen stood the same, looking in the floor half-shut in the light, staring at him from the part of the bed.